

On the Zionist Ideological Crisis

By Emile Touma

There are enough indications to substantiate the claim that the October 1973 war accelerated and sharpened an inherent and prolonged crisis in Israel covering the political, economic and ideological sectors.

The political crisis took shape in the mushroom growth of the protest movements directly after the cease fire in October 1973, in the prolonged difficulties of forming a government after the December 31, 1973 parliamentary elections, in the fall of the Meir-Dayan government a month and a half after its establishment, and in the emergence of the I.Rabin government with a majority of one in the Knesset.

The economic crisis expresses itself in a growing trade deficit, in inflation, in soaring prices and a lowering of the standard of living due to the continued expansion of military expenditures which represent over 50% of this year's budget of IL 35 billions (\$8.2 billion).

The new economic policy with its new taxes, cuts in expenditures on social services and compulsory loans bodes ill for the economy of Israel and the well-

being of the working masses, who are made to bear the main burden of the government's failures.

*

No doubt some aspects of the ideological crisis in Israel breed on the soil of capitalism and are common to capitalist societies in the U.S. and Western Europe. Thus when Professor Ya'acov Talmon speaks of a "general depression" in Israel, he does not describe a specific Israeli phenomenon but a general one, characteristic of capitalist societies, and "arising from the impossibility of fulfilling expectations." Talmon implies that the failure of establishing an egalitarian society was emphasized by allowing "slums to fester alongside suburbia." (Jerusalem Post, April 24, 1974.) In other words the deepening social polarization generates this mass feeling of bitterness and class antagonism which Talmon calls general depression.

Another aspect of the crisis common in states following an aggressive foreign policy, in a changing world, is the feeling of alienation from the ruling circles who follow such a policy. This feeling is influenced to a great extent by the general condemnation of world public opinion. Professor Kreitler defined this alienation as a "black public mood" whose source lay in the fact that the "Israeli had lost a sense of being in a state enjoying international prestige plus great security" after the October 1973 war. (Ibid.).

It is interesting in this context to note that Chief of Staff General Mordechai Gur, deploring the present rush of criticism levelled at the army, drew an analogy between Israel and the U.S.A. and contended that if the army is open to public scrutiny at all levels it would make its job very difficult "and we will reach the position of the Americans in Vietnam." (Jerusalem Post, July 2, 1974.)

Though some political analysts tried to accentuate the differences between the protest movements in Israel and similar movements in other capitalist countries by claiming that protesters in Israel were activists who fought in Israel's wars,* the truth is that these movements, in concentrating on the search for new leadership and demanding reactionary electoral changes,** reveal characteristic elements of the capitalist crisis.

* This contention, voiced by Rabbi Dr. J. Vainstein--at one time chairman of the Jerusalem Religious Council--does not hold water, since it was the veterans of the Vietnamese war who gave the protest peace movement in the U.S.A. much of its dimensions and depth.

** These movements call for replacing the more democratic system of proportional representation with the more reactionary constituent system of parliamentary elections.

It is clear that these movements, which claim as their raison d'etre the "failures" of the establishment in the October war, objectively ignore and gloss over the class nature of the political crisis and try to iron it out within the present basic concepts of the Israeli ruling circles.

Obviously the general capitalist ideological crisis, an outcome of the capitalist mode of production, has specific national features in every country, depending on its place in the whole world structure of capitalism. In Israel the capitalist ideological crisis is compounded by the crisis of Zionism, the ideology the Israeli ruling circles adhere to and act in accordance with.

*

In capitalist countries the ruling circles, in contending with working-class ideology, emphasize that their concepts and policies, internally and externally, are motivated by a compassion for the good of their peoples. Even aggressive wars destined to further imperialist expansion are waged under slogans of "national defense," "patriotic honor" and "people's interest."

The Israeli ruling circles resort to these same classical expressions in order to deceive the Israeli people. However it is in the sphere of Zionist ideology that the ideology of the Jewish bourgeoisie unfolds its crisis.

Zionist ideology has been founded on three basic categories: the existence of a Jewish extra-territorial nation, the immortality of anti-Semitism and Jewish concentration in one country as a solution for anti-Jewish persecution and harassment. In the final analysis, therefore, the validity of Zionism has to be judged by its practical ability to provide security for those Jews who accepted its basic platform and settled in this country.

It is precisely here that Zionist ideology faces its toughest challenge. Thus, Rabbi Vainstein, wrestling with this problem, wrote under the headline "Cracks in the Zionist Message:" "The historic Zionist message of the Jewish state as a safe haven for the nation, dispersed for two thousand years, has suddenly been shaken" (after the October 1973 war--E.T.).

How much it has been shaken is relative and differs according to the social strata. But the ex-M.K. and writer-novelist seems to have discovered a common "leitmotif" when he said, commenting on the climate of the post-October period:

"Suddenly everything is under a question mark. Questions that ceased to be asked during other nations' histories never leave us. During the worst days of the blitz no one ever doubted that London would remain England's capital or whether all of England belonged to the English or who is an Englishman...." ("Innocence Lost," Jerusalem Post, April 24, 1974.)

Nathan Rotenstreich, a professor of philosophy in the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in his article "The Problem behind the Shock" was more definitive and showed an understanding of the interconnection between the ideological and practical crisis of Zionism. He wrote:

"It seems that the idea of a secure refuge, which appears from the Basel Zionist Congress on, and which guided Zionism in one form or another, and its project, the state of Israel, is undermined." And he added: "When the idea of a secure refuge or a refuge guaranteed by public law was raised, its meaning was legal, not physical, not security in the usual sense of the term used today." (Dispersion and Unity, No. 21/22, 1973/74, p. 40.)

Rotenstreich considers further the universal implication of Zionism and concludes, first, that the state of Israel not only did not solve the problem of anti-Semitism, "but even has deepened and reinforced the problem by arousing anger against what the Jews have done," and second, that the collective existence of the Jewish people, which is the goal of Zionism, "is still unsolved and not yet secured against destruction, open or hidden, and at times shocking." (Ibid., pp. 45-46.)

*

Certain Zionists originally emphasized total concentration of the Jews in one territory--Palestine, later Israel. But experience forced upon the leaders a sense of realism and they became reconciled to the idea that only a part of the Jewish communities would settle in Israel.

Moreover, the last decades and especially the period of statehood have proved that Israeli society was in a continual process of fluidity. Emigration from the country reached a high percentage. Up to 1967 about 200,000 left the country. Now authoritative sources report acceleration in this trend; and the Immigrant Absorption Ministry has admitted that "within three years 30 per cent of the immigrants who arrived from the West in 1970 had left the country"--and that 5 per cent of those who came from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa had departed. (Jerusalem Post, May 17, 1974.)

Under these conditions the Zionist ideologists elaborated the concept of the "centrality of Israel" as the instrument to establish and perpetuate the Jewish collective existence. This is a call upon the Jewish communities to identify with Israel. The idea of identification has been developed to imply allegiance to the policy of the Israeli ruling circles. In addition, infusing the Jewish communities with Judaic education is becoming a means to fight assimilation and maintain the Jewish collective outside Israel. And it is here that the ideological crisis of Zionism is increasingly apparent and is expressed in the spread of alienation among Jews everywhere.

Arnulf M. Pins, director of Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in the U.S.A., describing the impact of the October war on American Jewry, wrote: "Reaction of American Jewry as a whole to the 'Yom Kippur' war is mixed. One segment of American Jewry is amazingly identified, very involved and totally committed...while another part of American Jewry--a relatively large group--is surprisingly ambivalent and/or not committed and seems to be trying to remain uninvolved. Some American Jews have begun to question all over again the viability and advisability of a Jewish state."

The writer, comparing the reaction of American Jews to the last two Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, stresses that as a result of the first many Jews "rediscovered their Jewishness" and "turned on" to Israel and adds: "The observers all agree that this did not happen to any large degree in 1973." (Dispersion and Unity, 21/22, 1973/74, pp. 67,68,69.)

It is obvious that the writer describes the situation in non-Zionist circles and leaves out the large segment of anti-Zionist Jews in the U.S.A. Thus, the general picture is far from rosy. The vociferous Zionist lobby in the U.S.A. gives the impression of dominance over the U.S. "Jewish scene," but this is due to the collusion between the Zionist leadership (including the Israeli ruling circles) and the U.S. imperialists.

The situation is not different in the other capitalist countries. In France, where the Zionists challenge strenuously the support that many French Jews give to the Communist Party, the process of alienation is accelerating.

The Zionist writer Geoffrey Wigoder, analyzing the results of the French presidential elections noted that in one or two constituencies the Communists succeeded in consolidating the Jewish Left wing behind their party. Moreover, the great hopes over Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union are being dissolved. It is now being admitted openly that there has been a drop of 30% in the number of immigrants from the Soviet Union during the first five months of this year compared with the same period of the preceding year. (Jerusalem Post, June 12, 1974.)* Second, the disappointment of these immigrants drives them out of the country. Professor Yirmiyahu Branover, chairman of Shamir,** was reported "perturbed by the number of Soviet immigrants who arrive in Israel and integrate economically, but then wish to leave (and they do so in increasing numbers--E.T.) as they feel alienated from Israeli society as a

* The actual drop for 1974 is about 50%--Ed.

** An organization set up to help integrate immigrants from the Soviet Union.

whole." (Jerusalem Post, June 18, 1974.)*

The professor noted that many Jews have assimilated in the Soviet Union and added that many others are on the way and lamented that three million Jews in the Soviet Union may disappear in twenty years. The thought nagged P. Sapir, recently elected chairman of both the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Executive, and he expressed it in these words: "I openly fear the process of degeneration and really wonder what will be left of the Jewish people 50 years from now." (Jewish Observer and Middle East Review, June 28, 1974.)

Arye Dultzin, treasurer of the Jewish Agency speaking in the June 1974 Session of the Zionist General Council "maintained that an entire generation of young Jewish leaders in their thirties and forties were estranged from Zionism because of the movement's political division." (Jewish Observer and Middle East Review, June 28, 1974.) No one will take this claim seriously. Estrangement has deeper roots and the present phase of the Zionist ideological crisis has been precipitated by the acuteness of what Zionists call "The Arab problem."

Tzvi Lamm, Lecturer on Education at the Hebrew University Jerusalem, in an article titled "Zionism's Path from Realism to Autism: The Price of Losing Touch with Reality," negates the concept that Zionism is a national movement for liberation and holds that it is in essence a rescue movement. He insists that it is not the land of Israel that needed to be liberated but the people of Israel. Therefore: "Along with the building of fortifications there was also recognition that without agreement, without talks, without finding a modus vivendi with the Arabs our existence in this land and this region of the world was not assured." (Dispersion and Unity, 21/22, 1973/74, p. 48-50).

However this recognition was shelved and the Zionist leaders of Israel passed from realism to autism, which meant using military power to dictate to the Arab peoples. Lamm notes that to this period belong "the Sinai campaign and the six-day war" and writes significantly that the term "liberated territory" coined to describe the occupied Arab areas "symbolizes the prevailing autism."

Putting his idea in a nutshell, he continued to say that he and others

* An insight into this problem was revealed by a certain Shulamit Atkin who wrote a letter to the Jerusalem Post (July 1, 1974) and described herself as a new immigrant from the U.S. Commenting on P. Sapir's election to the post of Chairman of the Jewish Agency and his desire to bring in 100,000 immigrants a year, she suggested that the first priority should be to keep immigrants in the country and to raise the standard of living of the families of Oriental origin. Then she remarked to emphasize her point: "There must be some reason why 100,000 Israelis live in New York City."

discovered after the six-day war "an enlightening phenomenon: The Zionist ideology, which from the very beginning guided Zionist activity, regressed and was translated into the language of a power ideology."

Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Jewish Congress and at one time president of the World Zionist Organization, addressing the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, accused Ben-Gurion of responsibility for the "deep crisis which Israel is now passing." Israel was paying for twenty years of Bengurionism. He enlarged on the theme: "While he (Ben-Gurion) knew that Israel must make concessions to the Arabs he was stubborn and refused to do as he should. The crisis today is paying for 20 years of delusions of grandeur." (Jewish Observer and Middle East Review, June 1, 1974.)

Zionists admit that their project meant displacing the Arab people of Palestine. They are apt to repeat Weizmann's dictum: The modern conflict between Arabs and Jews is not a case of a conflict between right and wrong but is one of conflicting rights. Weizmann would say, our case is more just because our needs are greater.

But Zionists in periods of success ignore completely the rights of the Palestinian Arab people and the conflict becomes one of right against the Arab wrong. However in periods of rebuff or setback the Zionists go into public soul-searching and begin to speak of compromise. Professor Rotenstreich, learning the lesson of the October 1973 setback, wrote that "since the six-day war we should have been prepared to find a synthesis between our devotion to our goal and the spirit of compromise, between keeping what is necessary for our national existence and a readiness to give up what must be given up." (Dispersion and Unity, 21/22, 1973/74, p. 44.)

The problem naturally is more complex. Zionism's crisis involves strategy not tactics. It is the basic Zionist ideological concepts that are involved, not this tactic or that; and because Zionism, like other capitalist reactionary ideologies, cannot change its nature or characteristics, the present crisis will deepen and envelop Zionism ultimately.

The question differs with Israel. It has reached the stage where a change of strategy can break the magic circle of wrong breeding wrong. In order to do so, Israel has to relinquish Zionist expansionism and recognize the national rights of the Palestinian Arab people. This will mean a break with the policy of collusion with imperialism against the Arab peoples and their struggle for political and social emancipation.

It is in this way that Israel can ensure its security, peaceful existence and acclimatization in the region. When such a stage is reached, Zionist ideology as a determining force in Israel becomes archaic.